

CALIFORNIA OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES



LEGAL SECRETARIES



WHAT DOES A LEGAL SECRETARY DO?

LEGAL SECRETARIES do specialized clerical and administrative tasks to help lawyers and staff to carry out their work and ensure efficient operation of the law office. Their work involves knowledge and use of legal words and phrases, forms, procedures, computers, and case management.

Legal Secretaries work in private law firms, government agencies, financial institutions, insurance companies, and public utility companies.

Legal Secretaries perform the following tasks:

- Prepare and process legal documents and papers, such as summonses, subpoenas, complaints, appeals, motions, and pretrial agreements.

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INTEREST AREA
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- Review legal publications and perform data base searches to identify laws and court decisions relevant to pending cases.
- Submit articles and information from searches to attorneys for review and approval for use.
- Assist attorneys in collecting information such as employment, medical, and other records.
- Organize and maintain law libraries and document and case files.
- Complete various forms, such as accident reports, trial and courtroom requests, and applications for clients.
- Mail, fax, or arrange for delivery of legal correspondence to clients, witnesses, and court officials.
- Attend legal meetings, such as client interviews, hearings, or depositions, and take notes.
- Draft and type office memos.
- Receive and place telephone calls.
- Schedule and make appointments.
- Make photocopies of correspondence, document, and other printed matter.

WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT?

Legal Secretaries should be able to type 50 to 90 words per minute and transcribe dictation at 80 to 120 words per minute.

Important skills, knowledge, and abilities for Legal Secretaries include:

- Time Management – Managing one's own time and the time of others.
- Reading Comprehension – Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work-related documents.
- Coordination – Adjusting actions in relation to others' actions.

- Clerical – Knowledge of administrative and clerical procedures and systems such as word processing, managing files and records, stenography and transcription, designing forms, and other office procedures and terminology.
- Law and Government – Knowledge of laws, legal codes, court procedures, precedents, government regulations, executive orders, agency rules, and the democratic political process.
- English Language – Knowledge of the structure and content of the English language including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.
- Written Comprehension – The ability to read and understand information and ideas presented in writing.
- Oral Comprehension – The ability to listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
- Written Expression – The ability to communicate information and ideas in writing so others will understand.

WHAT'S THE WORK ENVIRONMENT?

Generally, Legal Secretaries work in an office environment. Since the job involves editing legal documents, Legal Secretaries may sit for long periods of time. There is a chance of moderate to high stress levels due to the pressure of working to meet deadlines.

With more firms automating their offices, Legal Secretaries are assuming responsibilities previously handled by managers and professionals. These responsibilities may include running spreadsheet programs and keeping database files.

Union Membership

So far, there has been little or no unionization of Legal Secretaries.

WHAT'S THE CALIFORNIA JOB OUTLOOK?

The following information is from the occupational projections produced by the

Employment Development Department (EDD) Labor Market Information Division (LMID):

Estimated number of workers in 2000:	38,100
Estimated number of workers in 2010:	46,000
Projected Growth 2000-2010:	20.7%
Est. openings due to separations by 2010:	7,100

These figures do not include self-employment.

Trends

Legal Secretaries employment growth rate will be average compared with all occupations in California. Contributing to the average rate of growth in some law offices is the fact that paralegals are assuming some tasks formerly done by Legal Secretaries. In addition, lawyers in small and large law offices often share Secretaries.

WHAT DOES THE JOB PAY?

California Wages

Legal Secretaries 2002 Wages

Hourly wages range from	\$14.85	to	\$23.90
Average hourly wage	\$19.89		
Average annual wage	\$41,380		

Source: Occupational Employment Survey of Employers by EDD/LMID.

Hours

Legal Secretaries usually work 35 to 40 hours per week, but overtime is frequently needed. They get either time-and-a-half pay or equivalent time off for overtime work.

Benefits

Employers usually provide benefits such as vacation, sick leave, and health insurance. Annual bonuses are frequently paid to Legal Secretaries working for private law firms.

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THE JOB?

Education and Training

Prospective Legal Secretaries should have a high school diploma with a concentration of business and computer classes. Community colleges,

business schools, adult education centers, and professional associations offer Legal Secretary training.

Some employers will hire and train workers with good office skills obtained through several years of general secretarial experience. However, most employers prefer workers with several years of law office experience. Attorneys who specialize in litigation often require specific litigation experience.

Licensing and Certification

Many Legal Secretaries obtain certification for purposes of career advancement and higher salaries. In California, Legal Secretaries, Incorporated (LSI) has approximately 2,500 members and offers certification through the California Certified Legal Secretary (CCLS) program. The National Association for Legal Secretaries offers two types of certification:

- Accredited Legal Secretary (ALS) for those entering the occupation who have taken at least two legal training courses.
- Professional Legal Secretary (PLS) for Legal Secretaries who have at least three years experience in the legal field.

A Legal Secretary can also become a Certified Professional Secretary (CPS) through the International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP). A minimum of two year's work experience is required to take the exam.

Continuing Education

Legal Secretaries certified through CCLS are required to take continuing education courses to maintain their certification; however the ALS and PLS programs do not require continuing education to keep certification current. Organizations such as LSI offer continuing education seminars, and workers looking to keep up with legislative changes that may affect their work can read such publications as *The Legal Secretary*.

HOW DO I FIND THE JOB?

Direct application to employers remains one of the most effective job search methods. Private firms are listed in the yellow pages under Legal Services, Secretarial Services, and Paralegals. California job openings can be found at various online job-listing systems including CalJOBSSM at www.caljobs.ca.gov or at America's Job Bank at www.ajb.dni.us.

Job seekers also should search:

- Classified ads in local newspapers.
- Law journals.
- High school, college and university career centers.
- Personnel departments of federal, State, city, and county government agencies.

For other occupational and wage information and a listing of the largest employers in any county, visit the Employment Development Department Labor Market Information Web page at www.calmis.ca.gov. Find further job search assistance from your nearest Job Service office www.edd.ca.gov/jsloc.htm or the closest One-Stop site listed on the California WorkNet site, www.sjtcc.ca.gov/sjtccweb/one-stop.

WHERE CAN THIS JOB LEAD?

Certified and experienced Legal Secretaries can advance to supervisory or lead positions. A Legal Secretary with a minimum of a two-year degree and a paralegal training certificate can advance to a paralegal position. In addition, some go to law school to become an attorney.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Legal Secretaries Incorporated (LSI)
12842 Hortense Street
Studio City, CA 91604-1123
(800) 281-2188
<http://lsi.org/>

National Association of Legal Secretaries
314 East 3rd Street, Suite 210
Tulsa, OK 74120-2409
(918) 582-5188
www.nals.org

International Association of Administrative Professionals
P.O. Box 20404
Kansas City, MO 64195-0404
(816) 891-6600
www.iaap-hq.org

Employment Projections by Occupation
www.calmis.ca.gov/htmlfile/subject/occproj.htm

Employment and Wages by Occupation
[www.calmis.ca.gov/file/occup\\$/OES\\$.htm](http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/occup$/OES$.htm)

RELATED OCCUPATIONAL GUIDES

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Bookkeeping, Accounting and Auditing Clerks	No. 26
Secretaries	No. 128
Court and Shorthand Reporters	No. 162
General Office Clerks	No. 295
Paralegals	No. 464
Medical Assistants	No. 513

OCCUPATIONAL CODE REFERENCES

SOC (*Standard Occupational Classification*)

Legal Secretaries 43-6012

O*NET (*Occupational Information Network*)

Legal Secretaries 43-6012.00

OES (*Occupational Employment Statistics*)

Legal Secretaries 55102

DOT (*Dictionary of Occupational Titles*)

Legal Secretary (clerical) 201.362-010